

Book review

Seashells of Eastern Arabia by Donald T. Bosch, S. Peter Dance, Robert G. Moolenbeek, and P. Graham Oliver. 1995. Motivate Publishing, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and London, 296 pages, US \$ 75 (discounts available for several copies). Available from: Motivate Publishing, London House, 19 Old Court Place, Kensington High Street, London W8 4PL, United Kingdom or Motivate Publishing, PO Box 2331, Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Rarely does a new shell book make such a stunning impression as this one. Two aspects make it simply **magnificent**; the excellent colour photographs throughout by Neil Fletcher, and the great scientific value of the content. "*Seashells of Eastern Arabia*" provides a wholly new survey within two covers of a previously little-known fauna.

The large format (a little larger than A4) and, in many cases, enlarged photographs of even quite large shells, combined with SEM micrographs or reproductions of original drawings of a wide selection of micromolluscs, and a very valuable new account of **all** the bivalves (even tiny ones) by Graham Oliver, all contribute to make this book essential for both the professional malacologist and the well informed "amateur".

Fittingly, the book is dedicated to the late Kathie Smythe, who so enthusiastically tackled this poorly known fauna. The introduction contains a typically thorough Peter Dance history of the study of the fauna, but it is astonishingly brief – little separates F.W. Townsend, J.C. Melvill and H.E.J. Biggs late last century and early in this one from the recent major contributions by Kathie Smythe, M.D. Gallagher and the authors of this book. It is followed by a helpful ecological review, with excellent colour photos, and a list of Arabic place names.

Then follows the species descriptions, associated much more closely with the illustrations than most such books manage. This main section occupies over 250 pages, and describes 1273 species (864 gastropods, 375 bivalves, 14 chitons, 12 scaphopods, and 4 "shelled" cephalopods). While there clearly is a wealth of micromolluscs not covered here (many no doubt still to be discovered), examples are given of all the major groups, and it appears to me that this book provides a fuller coverage of the fauna than almost all other shell books, other than those on the really well described faunas (best exemplified, perhaps, by Tucker Abbott's "American Seashells"). It is pleasing to see all of the shelled heterostrophs (including opisthobranchs and marine pulmonates) included, although there is clearly a remaining opportunity for a popular work on the nudibranchs.

Excellent introductions to morphological terms, a good bibliography, a glossary and a detailed index all contribute to the usefulness and overall high standard of scholarship of this book. Boxes scattered throughout the main text provide interesting sidelights on the history or other significance of particular species or specimens – most notably the two original Melvill and Standen specimens of *Conus clytospira* (now known as *C. milneedwardsi*). Surprising range data can be discovered in here for even quite common, widespread species. Who knew, until now, that *Cymatium parthenopeum* is common in eastern Arabia? Although this superdisperser is widespread in the Mediterranean and in the temperate and tropical Atlantic, it is a warm-temperate "fringe species" in the Pacific, avoiding the central tropics (perhaps out-competed by *C. pileare*? – but **both** occur in eastern Arabia).

As always there are a few points for nitpickers to pounce on. The only one obvious to me is the question of where to put *Colubraria* – Phil Maxwell and I (1987) located it in the Buccinidae, and "*Colubraria*" *antiquata* in the plesiotritonine genus *Tritonoharpa* (the species is evidently not *T. antiquata*, either, but there are probably many unnamed species in this genus). Many readers will also have differences of opinion with the authors about some of the genera and subgenera used in some groups. But these minor points do not in the least detract from a brilliant work, with the highest quality printing. The previously unknown bivalve fauna is a particular eye-opener, comparable to Graham Oliver's earlier "Bivalved Seashells of the Red Sea" (1992; Hemmen, Wiebaden) in its impact on our knowledge of these molluscan "orphans". However, I am sad to see that (as usual) the enormous "family" Turridae is under-represented with only 26 species.

Popularisation of this group is needed, so that in the long run the awful problems in its classification can be resolved. This book missed an important opportunity here.

The occasional taxonomic revelation that can come to light from a wide reading of faunal surveys such as this one is shown by *Nuculana bellula* (A. Adams, 1856)(p. 204, fig. 900). This name is in current use in New Zealand for the abundant Pliocene to living *Saccella* species of shallow shelf faunas. The New Zealand shell is similar to the one figured by Oliver (see Powell, 1979, p. 359, fig. 85.1) but obviously has coarser sculpture and a significantly shorter anterior end. Usage of this name has followed uncritically from Suter (1913, p. 835–6) who pointed out that Martens (1873, p. 49) had identified the New Zealand species as *Leda concinna* A. Adams, 1856; and yet Suter continued to use *L. bellula*, despite quoting a letter from E.A. Smith pointing out precisely those differences that are obvious from Oliver's illustration. Clearly, the name *L. concinna* needs investigation as a more appropriate one for the New Zealand species. How many more misidentifications of this sort await recognition? The publication of more and better faunal surveys, similar to the present one, will help world malacology become stabilised.

There has probably never before been a book on marine molluscs that so immediately provides easy access to such a previously unknown fauna. The team is to be congratulated on a brilliant job. I cannot recommend this book highly enough for the libraries of all serious students of Mollusca.

Alan Beu

Literature cited

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